

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: ELIZABETH MATTHEWS, 67, retired Dole Company
(Hawaiian Pine Company) forelady

Elizabeth (Maunakea) Matthews, half-Hawaiian, half-Irish, was born September 4, 1912 in Honolulu. When she was a few months old, she was hanaied to the Maunakea family. Elizabeth attended Kauluwela Elementary and Central Intermediate Schools until she was 15 years old. Starting at age 12, she helped her mother pick and sell bundles of ginger flowers every day. Elizabeth continued selling gingers and leis to the lei sellers until about 1960.

From 1927 to 1937, Elizabeth worked every summer at Hawaiian Pineapple Company as a packer. In the off-season, she found jobs as coffee bean cleaner and salesgirl with Amfac, or worked at California Packing Corporation and Libby's pineapple canneries. In 1931 she was made reliever at the cannery and switched to the night shift.

Elizabeth married George W. Matthews in 1931. Mr. Matthews at first worked for the City and County of Honolulu, and in 1947, he became a seaman. Between 1931 and 1946, Elizabeth bore eight children. In 1945, she worked for friends at two Waikiki restaurants, but left in 1946 to return to cannery work as an intermittent. In the early 1960's, Elizabeth was made a forelady for packing, and then for "specials." In 1977, at age 65, she retired. Her husband passed away that same year.

Since her retirement, Elizabeth has kept very active in Senior Citizen clubs, in hula, feather lei making, and Hawaiian language classes, and in the ILWU (International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union) Pensioners Club. She also has a job caring for an elderly woman.

Tape No. 6-11-1-79
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
With
Elizabeth Matthews (EM)
March 2, 1979
Liliha, Oahu
BY: Vivien Lee (VL)

VL: This is an interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Matthews. Today is March 2, 1979 and we're at her home in Liliha.

So first, can you just say for the record when you were born and where you were born.

EM: I was born in Honolulu, September 4, 1912.

VL: And you said when you were little you were hanaied to the Maunakea family, right?

EM: Yeah, then in November I was adopted. I don't know the date but the same year I was adopted by Mr. and Mrs. Daniel K. Maunakea.

VL: And Mr. Maunakea had what kind of job?

EM: He was a painter.

VL: House painter?

EM: Yeah, inside he did fancy painting. He was taught by a German painter. You have this on recording?

VL: Yeah.

EM: Oh. And it's still there on the fourth floor in the Dole Company cannery, imitation koa.

VL: He painted imitation koa?

EM: Imitation koa, yeah, out of the regular wood he painted it and made it and they still left it as it is today. When I go there, I start to think about it and the nice work he did.

VL: He had pretty steady work?

EM: Yeah.

VL: How about your hanai mother?

EM: Oh, she was a housewife. She didn't go out.

VL: How many were in the family?

EM: Only me. They lost a child. I was the only next one they adopted. They lost their own son, nine months old.

VL: How about grandparents, did they live in the house, too?

EM: Oh, yeah, my grandparents were there. Mr. and Mrs. John K. Maunakea, my grandmother and my grandfather. I was around them when I was little.

VL: So had about five people.

EM: Five of us all lived in the same house in that next lot.

VL: Right next to this one?

EM: Yeah, that one.

VL: In the family who handled the money? Who took care of money?

EM: Oh, my dad, he was working.

VL: You said you went to Kauluwela and Central Schools until ninth grade?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did you want to go to more school than that?

EM: Yeah, but my dad stopped me from going. He said, "You better go work." And while at Central I was doing after school work, housework, for three teachers.

VL: You mean you'd go to their homes?

EM: Yeah, every day after school.

VL: Did you do this because the family needed money?

EM: Yeah because I couldn't get lunch money from my dad. But going work like that I had my own lunch money and money to continue school. One was librarian at Central Intermediate, one was a piano teacher and teacher at Liholiho School way out Kaimuki and one was economics teacher at the old Normal School. And they were all Miss, they weren't married and I learned a lot of things from them.

VL: And this was every day after school?

EM: Every day after school, Monday through Friday. Three dollars a week. That's why I envied the people at the cannery, the girls telling me, "Oh, you better quit that job and go work in the cannery."

And then I said, "Oh, I cannot, they [the teachers] gonna ask me to go on a trip to Canada."

Then I came and I asked my mom and my dad [if I could go] for the summer and then return. They didn't want me make that trip. They said, "You stay right here." And then I didn't go back work with them [the teachers] no more. After that I went to the cannery, that summer, that very summer. Fourteen going to fifteen [years old].

VL: If you could have, would you have continued school?

EM: Yes, because I know they would pay me and I would still be working for them, you know. They felt bad.

VL: Yeah, so how come you didn't go back to school?

EM: Because my father said, "You'd better get out of school because there's not enough money to send you to school."

VL: But you were the only child in the family?

EM: No my father was going with another woman [at the same time he was married to EM's hanai mother] and then had children in the family. He put them through St. Louis College, the son, and put her daughter through Sacred Hearts Academy. That's where the problem was.

VL: Were they younger than you?

EM: They were one year older than me. Private school.

VL: Did you have an idea that you would like to be something when you grew older?

EM: Yeah.

VL: What was that?

EM: Like what, oh, like anything. You know, to better myself.

VL: You didn't have anything specific in mind?

EM: No, no, no. But all the time I was living at home I was doing that extra business in the morning before I went school, help my mom pick the gingers.

- VL: Oh, can you explain about how you folks did that? This was your hanai mom and she was picking gingers....
- EM: Every morning and I helped her with it and I helped to take them down to the lei stand on Maunakea Street, that's coming up King and Maunakea, all on the right. There was a special people there, Mr. and Mrs. Akana. They bought our gingers. Then I would catch the bus....no, I had to come home return the money and then go school, walk back to school.
- VL: How old were you when you first started helping your mom?
- EM: Well about 12.
- VL: And what exactly would you do in the morning?
- EM: Get up early, pick gingers and have breakfast and then go school. I delivered the flowers.
- VL: How long did it take you to pick the gingers?
- EM: Oh, about an hour because we get up 5:30 [a.m.] and then when summertime we wake up 5 o'clock earlier, you know, daylight time.
- VL: Where did you pick the gingers?
- EM: Right in front here, our neighborhood was all around that park [there is now a public park with a natural spring behind EM's house].
- VL: How many did you pick?
- EM: Five thousand.
- VL: Did you count each one?
- EM: Count, wrap each in ti leaf and took all that. They bought everything, 5,000, and as the season go, it comes less and less then we don't sell 'em no more. And then [after the peak season] we string it up and then sell it on our own because they were making big money with the ships coming in and out, eh.
- VL: You said you would bundle the gingers....
- EM: All in hundreds, yeah, count. You walk down that lei stand today and you walk down Maunakea Street, I walk down I seen all the gingers all bunched up in one hundreds but with string, not with ti leaf, because ti leaf cost money today. Before ti leaf was plentiful.
- VL: How much would they give you for one bundle?

EM: Five cents a hundred.

VL: You folks could make quite a bit of money that way.

EM: Yeah, 5,000.

VL: Did you get any money for your help?

EM: Yeah, I did, but not too much. As I told you, my aunty took all that for the week. But the weekend, I had it, we have it all.

VL: So during the week even your mom wouldn't get paid for doing that?

EM: Whatever they give her, maybe something, but not much. Hard times, you know, before.

VL: How come you went...

EM: To the cannery?

VL: To Dole [Hawaiian Pineapple Co.], to cannery work? Could you have done some other kind of work?

EM: It was more money. But before I went to Dole, I went to work at American Factors.

VL: You didn't work cannery first and then go there?

EM: Oh yeah, I worked cannery first, right.

VL: That was when you were 15 [1927]?

EM: Yeah.

VL: How come you chose Hawaiian Pine?

EM: That was the nearest.

VL: And can you tell how you got the job?

EM: Yeah, they tell you to come. "Make sure you are tall and strong and everything" (Laughs), that's what they tell you.

VL: Who told you that?

EM: The bosses that hire you.

VL: Did you go down there by yourself?

EM: Me and a bunch of girls would go, yeah.

VL: You and a bunch of girls?

- EM: Yeah, from the school. We would all go down there look for work.
- VL: And did you have to fill out some kind of application form or something?
- EM: Yeah, your name, your address, your phone number.
- VL: Was it easy to get hired?
- EM: Yeah, they hired. They was having so much fruit that they hired children, all ages, as long as you were tall and strong.
- VL: Did they hire mostly Hawaiians or...
- EM: All kind nations. All nations, they weren't particular about it. Was all Japanese, Hawaiian, Chinese, Filipino, all. They weren't partial.
- VL: So it was pretty easy...
- EM: Yes, to get in. But the summer was so short that you get laid off and then they would keep the work for the ones that worked there steady, you know, for them to finish up.
- VL: You mean, in the day you would be laid off earlier?
- EM: Not in the day, it's like a season from June to September, supposed to be. No, June to maybe August and they lay you off and leave the rest because the cannery was running all the year around. October, November, December, but they were the intermittents at that time. Or regular workers, you know.
- VL: Would you, at that time when you first went when you were 15, would you rather have been intermittent?
- EM: Yeah.
- VL: But you couldn't?
- EM: I couldn't. Was so hard to be an intermittent.
- VL: How did they choose intermittents?
- EM: I don't know. I would go there just summers and summers and summers.
- VL: Did you ask them if you could be an intermittent?
- EM: Yeah, I finally asked and then they pushed you up. They made you intermittent.
- VL: This was much later?

- EM: Yeah, much later. [Approx. 1947] I think in 1930 or 1931 when I was just getting married, then I worked but you have to work nighttime so I took the nighttime work. Until 1937.
- VL: That was all seasonal nighttime work?
- EM: Yeah.
- VL: Now, going back to when you were seasonal that first couple of seasons at Hawaiian Pine, you were living with your parents?
- EM: Yeah, we were living here.
- VL: How did you get to be a packer?
- EM: Right there, they hire you right at the time. "What would you like to be, a packer or a trimmer?" So I asked for packer and I've been a packer and packing forelady all my lifetime.
- VL: How did you know that you wanted to be a packer instead of something else?
- EM: I had sisters, older sisters, half sisters who were married already. That was by my mom with her first marriage. They were packers. They told me to take packing, don't take trimming.
- VL: Why did they say that?
- EM: (Laughs) I don't know.
- VL: Who taught you to pack?
- EM: The ladies there, experienced ladies. They taught us to pack.
- VL: Can you describe how they told you to pack?
- EM: Well the pineapple would come up whole and sliced and the trimmers would have to lay them on [the belt] butt end first and if they have it crooked, you pack it crooked. If you kind of green, eh, and not used to. Then the top and the bottom [end slices] were flipped down on the side. [See diagram section in Introduction.]
- VL: Who does that?
- EM: The packer. You flip it off with your hand. You have rubber gloves and then your best pieces [fancy] are at the butt end, bottom end and your number 2 pieces [choice] were on the top end. That was number 2 slices and number 1 slices. Then you'd have to look for cores in them. If had core that was extra big in them, you know, the Ginaca did not go right through with the rod to get the core right in the center. That was discarded and that was all for jam and crush, before, was run into jam and crush. Only two kinds are packed, they had for a while. Then bumbai when they really needed the pineapple, they had three kinds of pack, 1, 2 and 3. They have the half slices, broken slices for number 3.

- VL: So when you first went, what were you packing, which kind?
- EM: The 1 and 2 for the first year and then next year when I went there the next summer, I packed three ways. One, two and three.
- VL: Those days how many people are at one packing table?
- EM: Well, I think about 10 or 12. Today they only got three. It's all automatic and you just strip on the side [stripped end slices are put on lower belt] and just throw it up and the next girl just roll [the pine to look for eyes and spots] and another one watch that it all goes in that machine right.
- VL: Those days, your days, they didn't have a separate stripper who only stripped the two ends?
- EM: No, no separate stripper.
- VL: So the first woman would have to do that?
- EM: Yeah, she would have to strip and then the rest would pick up theirs and they know which was theirs coming on, not supposed to have an extra going down.
- VL: So there is the first person does just strip?
- EM: Just strip.
- VL: That's all she does?
- EM: Yeah. Then you rotate, then you move down and the girl on the end, half an hour comes on the top and she does the same job you do.
- VL: You rotate every half hour?
- EM: Yeah.
- VL: What position did you like the best?
- EM: Didn't matter. Didn't matter. Now it's all different, all automatic. Everything has to be clean and it goes--if it's not clean, it gets choked in that automatic and it's held up. Your table has to be stopped.
- VL: In those days, did the table ever stop for any reason?
- EM: Oh, unless machine trouble.
- VL: And then what would you folks do?
- EM: Rest there and wait. Could be the main machine trouble, yeah. Could be outside or could be no fruit or machine trouble. Or the lower belt underneath where the rest of the pieces that goes.

They make jam with it, crushed jam and juice and either they overload it and the belt is heavy and the belt gets stuck too, you know, jammed. Then you stop and it's only five minutes then it's going again.

VL: Did you think that the work [packing] was fast?

EM: Wasn't as fast as today. Now it's fast, today. Before was slower. The belt was timed, going down slowly, you know.

VL: You didn't feel you had to hurry?

EM: Hurry, yeah.

VL: In packing you had to use some kind of judgment, yeah, as to what is good...

EM: What is no good. And then the forelady would inspect because you're packing right in the cans right there and it's two grades and the third grade is down the end, you see. Then she would see your mistakes and show you why. Take it out of the can---whether you got the first grade in the second grade can or you got the second grade of pineapple in the first grade can. And then right there you learn your mistakes.

Now they're teaching differently. The girls go to like a school when they're hired. They go to classes and the pineapples are all brought out and sliced and if they're a trimmer, it's all brought to them and showed how to trim, all go through that and then to the slicers they're all showed how the slices go through and they're taught how to grade them.

VL: Do you think they should have done that when you first started?

EM: Yeah, that's what I think. So, that's the new method today.

VL: But you learned?

EM: Yeah, you learn, I learned.

VL: Would you have felt differently about your job if there was no judgment on your part, like you didn't even have to think about anything?

EM: No, you have to look what is good and bad.

VL: Did you like having to figure that out?

EM: Yeah that was good training, you know, or not they would put anything in the can.

VL: How did you feel at the end of the day?

- EM: Well, being young you're not too tired, you know.
- VL: Did you feel like you had accomplished something?
- EM: Yeah, you had the day's work. But we usually didn't have long hours. But when the peak of the season, we had long hours, over eight hours, nine, ten hours.
- VL: Were you paid the same amount per hour?
- EM: No, you were paid extra, yeah.
- VL: What were you getting that time?
- EM: Seventeen cents, uh, thirteen cents.
- VL: And then if you worked over...
- EM: Overtime, then you have a little bonus added but I don't know what it was but it was added.
- VL: Did they have ways of making you pack faster or incentive some kind of?
- EM: Later on in years, yeah. They tune the machine up faster. Both the outside, the Ginaca, plus the inside, the slicer, everything was oiled up and tuned up faster as the years went by. And then got automatic and they cut off the girls. They didn't need that much girls, eight to ten on a table, or nine. Ten, nine, eight, they cut down till it's three today.
- VL: As more and more machines...
- EM: Came, yeah. They invented more machines. The work was cut shorter.
- VL: When you were packing, how did you know where to sit?
- EM: Everyone had a spindle chair underneath the table. And then as the pineapple comes out from the machine they was chairs but they didn't want you to sit down at all. You have to stand up as much as you can.
- VL: Why?
- EM: They didn't allow it. They say you're lazy if you sit down.
- VL: Didn't that get tiring for your feet?
- EM: The feet, yeah. Before we work with slippers. After that was so many accidents. Filled cans drop on the feet, feet swollen. The trays, board trays drop on your feet, you get hurt, put on full covered shoes. Changed everything and then until lately we had all run by rails, on top [overhead], automatic, wires that move

the cans on wheels. They bring them to you and you know which is your fancy and your choice, your number 1 and number 2, they were top and bottom. The bottom [rail] was number 1. The top one was number 2 and then the can is filled, you put it on that wire line and then it goes and it goes to number 1 area.

VL: When did they start doing this?

EM: Oh, I think was 20 years later, I think. (Laughs)

VL: Twenty years after you started?

EM: (Laughs) Yeah.

VL: So for those years before that, you packed all by hand?

EM: And in the tray. And they had boys to pick it up and stack it up and they had truckers to come over there and take it away, 12 high. Twelve trays high.

VL: How many per tray?

EM: Twenty cans in a tray.

VL: How long did it take you to fill up all the cans in a tray?

EM: Depends. If the pineapple comes down faster, if they're nice, real good all through, no speck, no eyes, they call it, pineapple eyes and it's good in color, not green, it fills up fast and the tray boy works hard and the trucker works hard where we are not working too hard.

VL: Oh, I see. Did you ever smell the pines to tell if it was fancy or second grade?

EM: No, you have to take it apart to see.

VL: Just by looking?

EM: Looking. Open it up. You cannot judge from outside after it's peeled. You have to open it apart. See, I'm the stripper, the next girl picks up one and she takes it apart and then she looks for her number 1 and number 2. She throws down the number 3 and the ladies on the end [of the table] picks it up, breaks it up and puts it in a gallon, the number 3, the broken pieces.

VL: Is she both packing both 1 and 2?

EM: The packer?

VL: Yeah.

EM: We pack. Yeah.

VL: You pack both...

EM: One and two.

VL: You don't just take the ones and leave the twos for somebody else?

EM: No, no, your whole pineapple, 1 and 2.

VL: You have to remember which goes in which can?

EM: It's marked. The trays are marked in colors. The red is number 1, the green is number 2. Yeah, by tray colors.

VL: So does each lady have in front of her both color trays?

EM: Yes, with a little can of water in case you find rubbish on it or you find pineapple bugs on it. They're little small bugs flying all around that's why they screen it from the outside and they have it all washed through the washer before coming in through the machines. Pineapples running to terrific wash, you know, tumble something like clothes, tumble around and wash. Not with soap but with strong splash of water.

VL: Did the work ever get boring to you?

EM: No. I don't think so.

VL: Could you do the work without thinking about it? Could you think about something else while you were packing?

EM: Oh, no. The forelady, she got her eyes on you. She had one or two tables before. She was in between, here and then she'd be there, she'd be here and she'd be there, you know. She was only in charge of packing. Today they have only one forelady from trimming to packing or from trimming to chunks.

VL: Could you talk while you were packing?

EM: It's a no-no.

VL: Did some people do it though?

EM: Yes.

VL: What other kinds of rules did the company have?

EM: No talking, no chewing gum, no perfume.

VL: How come they didn't want that [perfume]?

EM: Oh, it was too strong. It's sickening when it's mixed with the pineapple down there. In fact you had to go through what you call--dispensary to be checked and they tell you the rules there.

VL: When did you go to get checked?

EM: Right after you're hired. You're sent to the dispensary to see if you got asthma or what. That was about all.

VL: Did they check you for anything else at the dispensary?

EM: Lift up your clothes, see if you got sores, like before plenty had sores, impetigo, yeah. (They also checked for lice.) Now you get a thorough check up.

VL: Somebody told us they were giving pregnancy tests?

EM: Yeah.

VL: In the dispensary?

EM: You know why, because lots of them lied. They pregnant, they go work and you can't tell if they fat or pregnant, see, so now they go through a strip test (a physical exam).

VL: How about when you started in 1927, did they do that, give pregnancy tests?

EM: No, I didn't have.

VL: So later they started this?

EM: Later, they started.

VL: Any other rules that they had? No perfume, no gum.

EM: No gum chewing, no smoking, and the kind of shoes you wear and the kind of clothes you wear, you know, sleeveless clothes not allowed.

VL: How come?

EM: The... [EM makes gesture of underarm hair falling.]

(Laughter)

EM: You have to wear a covered cap right over your ears and put all your hair in which girls didn't like. They were strict.

VL: Who would check you, that you were following all the rules?

EM: The foreladies. The minute your hair was out, or bobby pins, "You get up and take all those pins off." "You use rubber bands," they tell you.

VL: Any other kind of rules?

EM: And then some of them like to wear the sleeveless and the pants long, all going in the juice because certain places was wet and

they're walking through. Remember the year before they were wearing the pants way down here, slushing through. You had to roll 'em up.

VL: In your day, did most people, most girls...

EM: No, we wear clothes and jeans. We had old jeans before and we had pedal pushers, below the knee, remember.

VL: They were allowed?

EM: Yeah, they were allowed but no short sleeves, no earrings, no necklaces and even over make-up, they sent you to scrub your face (Laughs). Before they were strict on that over make-up and no flowers in your hair, not even if you have a cap over it, no.

VL: Anything else?

EM: No, I don't think so.

VL: How about rules about how you should behave, this is in the early days, 1927?

EM: Oh, yeah, don't be loud. Some girls they yell at each other across, yeah. They call you into the office that you have to buckle down and be a lady. No yelling, you know. Don't get boisterous.

VL: What would happen if you did that too many---how many chances would you get?

EM: Only one. They allow you or maybe they give you a second chance, sometimes, but you are warned first and the last. The next time, you out because they could hire some more. There's plenty more who wants to work. You're not the only one.

VL: When you were packing at the very beginning, about how long did it take you to get used to the packing?

EM: Oh, about a week, I think, or less than a week [depending on] how fast you are.

VL: Did you know of any people who just couldn't get it?

EM: Yeah, we had a few so they were put on a special table with a special forelady till they got the knack of it, wasn't bad but you see every table all went out on a different time, you know. They'll stop the machine and maybe four tables'll be going out or two tables'll be going for rest period. Fifteen minutes rest period and then I rush down watch my sisters how they pack and they used to tell me, "Hey, you little kid, you'd better watch what we doing. See what we doing, like this and like that."

I said, "Yeah, okay, thank you." (Laughs) Always razzing me, my two sisters. Half sisters.

VL: That first summer that you worked do you remember about how many tables there were?

EM: I think was only 24 tables, was small and the crush table was right in the middle. All out, 1 to 24. Used to be from 1 to 48 but now it's 7 to 48. They cut off six tables.

VL: In your day, on your table, did you have friends on your table?

EM: We did have but they didn't want. You would make conversation (Laughs) and they would switch you around with a different forelady.

VL: You didn't have a choice of where to sit?

EM: No, you had no choice of going to what table you want. The forelady would know, they'd say, "That girl talk too much. That girl don't pay attention; she let just her pineapple go down." You know, things like that and they try to balance it out.

VL: Did you make new friends when you were working?

EM: Oh, yeah, many, many friends and I got a few still living till today. They were in that room that day [room at Makua Alii Senior Center where we first met]. Stay in that room. I got more than half a dozen of them living today.

VL: Did any of them work from that first summer?

EM: The one that did, I just went to her funeral. She was from Kakaako. Way back. She moved to the Mainland and then she died. She was brought here. I went to her wake in January. Then another friend, I went to her wake in February, too. She worked way back with me.

VL: Way back then, would you do things with those friends outside of the cannery when you left work? Would you ever get together with them?

EM: Yeah, we do. We get together. We call up each other and have a get together luncheon and all that. Up to the end...

VL: Even at the beginning, you did that?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did the company...

EM: The company had supplied us with buses. They were trucks but made into buses that we would have, after the harvest, we would have a harvest dance or a harvest picnic or we would have a picnic.

VL: Did you dance even when you were 15 years old?

EM: Yeah, yeah. We would have picnics and dances. Way back, right there in the cafeteria, yeah.

VL: What did you do with your earnings?

EM: Oh, give it all to my mom. My mom had another home here and my father didn't give enough money to us that we had to remortgage. We had a second mortgage so by working I helped my mom close up that second mortgage. Pay up or we would have lost it. I told my children that. They say, "Oh, no, Ma."

I said, "Yeah." That's how bad it was.

VL: That's only on your seasonal [employment], yeah?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did any seasonals like yourself, in the early days, move up to foreladies while they were still seasonal?

EM: Yeah, the two that died and another one, she's living down here, somewhere. I get to meet her down American Security Bank, yeah.

VL: Could you have become a forelady? When you first started you were seasonal, right? You were young, yeah?

EM: Couple of years later, I became reliever. They had forelady and reliever and then lately they had cut that [reliever] out, just forelady. They didn't want no reliever. This reliever would help the forelady out with anyone who wanted to go out, take a break before the time because maybe not feeling well or going to the dispensary and this reliever would take that girl's place while that girl goes out. She'd be working in her place.

VL: Did the reliever have to be extra skillful?

EM: Yeah, she knew her packing and all that business. She was picked by the head forelady to do that work.

VL: So a few seasons after you started, you were picked?

EM: Yeah, as a reliever. It goes like I go up and up.

VL: Did you get paid a little more as reliever?

EM: Yeah, a little more, couple more cents.

VL: Okay, so during the season when you were younger, you were day shift?

EM: Day shift.

VL: What was a typical day like?

EM: Like today.

VL: You would wake up in the morning...

EM: And start work at 7 o'clock but five to seven [6:55] the whistle would blow and then 7 o'clock the machines start and you work. Then for lunch, the whistle blows 11 o'clock and then 11:25 [a.m.], the whistle blows and you have to be back down by the table for 11:30 [a.m.]. You can have no longer lunch than that.

VL: Did they clean the tables while you were gone to lunch?

EM: Uh, no, unless it's in a mess. They have boys to shoot the place down [with water], yeah, and rake.

VL: Rake?

EM: Rake up with that kerosene can, Wesson Oil can, but before was kerosene, they made it like, with a broom, dustpan, cleaning all the pineapple up. And you shoot it down, you know, like a drain. You shoot it all down and it goes down to the pier. All under-water go down to the pier and all the crabs die down there because of the pineapple acid.

VL: How did you know that?

EM: Oh, yeah, we know it because nobody going pick up crab there during the summer. The crabs all dead. We used to go crabbing Sand Island. I used to swim across Sand Island. We all did. I used to go with my two sisters. Seaweed and crab.

VL: After lunch then, you would go back to work until the day was pau. Would you go home right after that?

EM: Yeah, we would come home.

VL: Did you have chores at home, too?

EM: Maybe my clothes, iron my clothes for the next day. Wash and--- before [when] we had cotton aprons, wash, starch, and iron your cap and apron. We had voile caps and, what you call, unbleached muslin aprons. We bought it and we starch, wash, starch and iron so look good. In the later years, all nylon, nylon caps and nylon aprons. Just wash (Laughs) and hang up.

VL: So you had to wash your own apron?

EM: Yeah. Only the boys didn't have to wash their tops and their caps. They change every day from way back.

VL: Hawaiian Pine does that for them?

EM: Yeah. It's sent to the laundry.

VL: Why didn't they do yours too, at the laundry?

EM: No, they figure we were women and we do ours and they're still doing it till today. Now they're giving them paper caps, you know, but the aprons are all washed by the laundry, Young Laundry.

VL: After about a couple of seasons then you started working at Amfac?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did you quit the cannery in order to work at Amfac?

EM: [Work at Amfac] was off season, not summer months. I was laid off [from cannery] so I went there [Amfac] to work.

VL: Then would you go back to the cannery...

EM: Yes, and when season I would run back (Laughs).

VL: How come you decided to work at Amfac, also?

EM: Oh, I heard from somebody---I went to pick coffee first for the start. I thought was a marvelous job. It took...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

VL: You say it took you how long to---this was cleaning the coffee beans, right?

EM: Beans.

VL: Three hundred pounds.

EM: Yeah, hundred pound bags each but take you three bags, 300 pounds to make it in eight hours. Fifty cents a bag.

VL: Did you do that because you had to have some extra money?

EM: Yeah, I have to have some extra money, I did that. Then I got promoted to the grocery department where I made \$9.00 a week.

VL: Was that better than you could make at the cannery?

EM: No, but that was better off season there, you know, and then when season came I just left that job (Laughs) and went back cannery. You make better at the cannery. There were all kinds of bonuses, see. If you work right through and you work extra hours, then they give you extra for that, you know. They call it bonuses.

- VL: And it's for what, doing what?
- EM: For working a little late. You get paid on that.
- VL: How about the work itself of those three, cleaning the coffee beans, the salesgirl and packing?
- EM: I rather have the cannery, yeah. Money was...
- VL: Say, just doing the work itself, never mind the money; of the kind of work, which would you like the best?
- EM: The cannery because you meet so many people all kinds of people, you know, over there and you mingle with them and until today, they remember me, lots of them, the ones bin after me, you know.
- VL: That time that you were working at Amfac, were you making the leis also, still?
- EM: The gingers, yeah, also too, helping my mother pick in the morning.
- VL: You were pretty busy then.
- EM: Yeah, plenty.
- VL: Were there any other kinds of jobs available for young women like yourself that may have paid more than Amfac?
- EM: Oh, yeah. I went to work for Waikiki Poi Bowl [restaurant] but that was later years. That was in the 1940's.
- VL: So in the 1930's, this is also Depression time, yeah you...
- EM: Yeah, no, I had nowhere else to work. I just stuck to that cannery.
- VL: And Amfac.
- EM: Amfac. That saved our place, our home.
- VL: Then in 1931 you got married?
- EM: I got married.
- VL: And you also had a baby that year?
- EM: Yeah, I had a baby that year.
- VL: What was your husband's job?
- EM: He was working for the City & County and they only had 10 days a month to work. They were trying to divide for everybody to have work. You couldn't work the whole month.

VL: Because of the Depression?

EM: Depression. Everybody was working 10 days a month and still we depended on that ginger. The ginger was here yet. Years and years we had those gingers.

VL: Were you working at that time?

EM: After I lost my baby, yeah, I went back to work.

VL: Oh, this one you lost?

EM: Yeah, I lost my first baby. Stillborn. I went right back to the cannery. I lost her in May. I got married in January. I was pregnant, I got married in January then I lost that baby then I went back work in June at the cannery.

VL: And that five months that you weren't working either at Amfac or at the cannery...

EM: Nobody, no place, just stringing lei and go pick the gingers but not (Laughs) as fast as when you're not pregnant.

VL: So your husband's working only 10 days must have been quite hard?

EM: Yeah, was hard.

VL: Were there any groups to help people?

EM: No more. We never even went to welfare.

VL: How about like, you know, the Japanese have tanomoshi?

EM: Like that, no more. I didn't join that. They had. You have to pay money, yeah, give money. They used that down the cannery. If you won then you got a jackpot, yeah.

VL: But you never joined that?

EM: No, I never. I stuck to gingers. I had 'em for my weekend, that made up a lot.

VL: You also mentioned, I think before, that you had a garden, you were growing some food, is that right?

EM: Taro. We had taro and luau. I used to pick that and sell it too, you know, but the luau was....yeah.

VL: Who planted it and kept it?

EM: We did, we maintained. After the ginger and then we had a space of nice ground like for picnic, like that, on this side where that oval thing is [a cement pond in the park next to her house]. We had taro all alongside that ditch, all alongside the border line,

all along and down where the road is, all in there, all taro and luau. Fifty cents a bag. Not today.

VL: Is that what your husband did when he wasn't working City & County?

EM: Oh, he would go fishing. He was a good fisherman. Dive, spear fish. He always brought fish, fresh fish, for our table. That's one lucky thing, too.

VL: So somehow you folks managed?

EM: We managed, yeah.

VL: You didn't have to go hungry?

EM: No, didn't go hungry.

VL: When you went back to the cannery after you lost your child, did you lose any seniority or had you not been accumulating it?

EM: No, I wasn't an intermittent yet. I didn't become an intermittent till 1947 because I stayed home from 1937 until 1947.

VL: So when you...

EM: When war was over then I went to work at Waikiki Poi Bowl and Waikiki Steakhouse and that Byer's Chips with that doughnut machine that they had.

VL: Between 1931 and 1937 you were nightshift. How was it to work at night?

EM: All right. Then I had my next baby, a boy. My mom watched at night and in the morning I get off early in the morning, maybe 5 o'clock, 4 o'clock in the morning, walk down and walk home. (Laughs) We didn't own no car.

VL: Did you have any feelings about being away from your baby?

EM: No and I breast-fed my baby. Had to go without nighttime. My mother gave 'em sugar and water or condensed milk. We had cream, Carnation cream, for formula that time.

VL: Between 1931 and 1937 were you also a reliever at that time?

EM: Yeah, nighttime, I was hired as reliever.

VL: They why did you quit in 1937?

EM: Well, my husband had a good job. He went out to sea, no, he didn't go out to sea until after the war, 1946 he went but he was getting better jobs here and there. He said no use [in my] going back work, stay home and raise the children.

VL: How many did you have by then?

EM: I had about four, I think, or five, yeah.

VL: So those 10 years that you stayed home, you raised your children?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did you do any kind of outside work?

EM: No.

VL: And your folks' income was adequate for...

EM: Yeah, was good, pretty good.

VL: And then in your household who would manage the money?

EM: He and I.

VL: What, equal-equal?

EM: Yeah, not equal. He would give me all his pay and I try manage. Then I left my mother and I moved out to a house of my own but close by. I lived in the back there. A big house for \$15.00 a month. We had a parlor, a dining room, a kitchen and then you had a little room as a little dining room there and all covered with wallpaper, beautiful and two bedrooms and a large porch and your outside bathroom, you know what I mean, the running one, and a wash house and a shower, everything. No go wrong. You can find a house \$15.00 a month? Nineteen thirty-seven.

VL: Yeah, even for those days it was cheap?

EM: Yeah, was cheap. But you had to pay your own water bill and light. We managed.

VL: Then in 1945 you started working again, Waikiki Poi Bowl?

EM: Yeah, Waikiki Poi Bowl, yeah.

VL: Why did you decide to start working again?

EM: Well, then my mother was a widow. My father died in 1941 in October just before the war break out, December 7, 1941. She was alone then she said, "You'd better move from there and move back with me but pay rent so we can keep up and hold up this mortgage." He left her in debt, you know. So I moved back with her.

VL: So you needed to find work?

EM: Find work and help her again.

VL: How come you didn't go straight back to the cannery?

EM: My husband said what he was doing was all right and that I not go to work but when he was making good, you know, wartime. He was working for U.S. Engineers.

VL: And you went to work at the restaurant instead of going back to the cannery?

EM: Cannery, yeah.

VL: Why was that?

EM: I went to help friends and some family of mine had that Poi Bowl up and then they had the Waikiki Steakhouse up so I went along with them, help them (Laughs). But same time I had good pay, 70 cents a hour, those years. Then, this one at Waikiki Steakhouse, he didn't want to raise our pay. We were getting 65 [cents] an hour working for his steakhouse and the cannery had a raise to 70 cents an hour. I quit. I went back to the cannery in 1947.

VL: How did you know the cannery...

EM: Oh, I was keeping in touch with the girls. (Laughs) I went right back and I stayed there since. This girl that [just] walked in, the youngest of all my children--I not talking about my hanai--she was born in 1946 so I went back work cannery and I made the children watch her when I went back work in 1947.

VL: How did you manage? You must have had---you had quite a few children and how did you manage to...

EM: Have somebody watch them? I had an aunty came stay with me. She was crippled but she had no place to stay--one foot--but gets along so she was the babysitter while I went to work.

VL: How about cooking? Who did cooking?

EM: Oh, I did my cooking. I did and then I took night shift too. When I went back I took 15 years night shift, 15 years day shift.

VL: The night shift you did first?

EM: Yeah. Oh, whatever, you know, I look if conditions weren't so good at home especially when they became teenagers, you know. That's why I wanted to work night shift so I know what's going on during the day.

VL: Did you give each of them chores to do?

EM: Oh yeah, they all had, they all had.

VL: How about your husband, did he have chores too?

EM: He worked out on sea. He became a seaman.

VL: So that means he was gone for a big chunk of time?

EM: Yeah.

VL: How much would he be gone?

EM: Oh, every 15 days. If he would go from here to the Mainland, five days go, one day in port, [and] 12 days come back then he would go to the Orient when he come back. Twice a month he would be home but just come home and then ship out that night. He wasn't home to mind the children that's why I had that aunt of mine watch, babysit.

VL: When he came home, would he give you his pay?

EM: Yeah, yeah, that's why we turned around and built this house. He stayed 25 years on the ship and then he retired.

VL: If you didn't go to work at the cannery, could you both have managed on his salary alone?

EM: I don't know. He had so many---he was going to the Orient, all around, plus he was a gambler. He couldn't see the money, yeah, couldn't see the money.

VL: So then...

EM: That's why I stuck to work. I had one boy educated. He came out with his Master's Degree in Idaho, my last boy.

VL: From your earnings?

EM: My earnings, my cannery earnings. I make a loan down there at the Credit Union and I have to pay back, deduction from my pay every week.

VL: How did you get to be an intermittent? When you first went back in 1947?

EM: Yeah.

VL: That was when they made you intermittent?

EM: Intermittent.

VL: How come they just let you jump right into intermittent?

EM: Well I worked just about a couple of weeks. Maybe my name was on the list.

VL: Did you apply for that?

EM: Yeah, you sign up for it. I signed for reliever first then when came open, you know it's on the blackboard for forelady, you sign in. Then you go school for it. Training and school.

VL: At the cannery?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Do they pay you for that?

EM: Yeah, while you're working.

VL: What kind of training?

EM: The same thing you're doing but supervising.

VL: It was in a separate classroom that you would go?

EM: Yeah. We would have a classroom to go to and have briefings, a lot of briefings, especially when the summer starts. We all have a good briefing.

VL: What did they tell you?

EM: About watch for the types of children that come in, you know. We have some odd cases, some slow. Just like school, some fast, some don't care. They're absent and they're always late. They rush in late.

VL: So they trained you how to handle these children?

EM: Yeah, those children, yeah. But I had the ones that all the foreladies threw up their hands. I had the problem children, boys and girls.

VL: They sent them all to you?

EM: Yeah. I had that type of children.

VL: How come you got them?

EM: My head forelady thinks I can talk and talk to them into it and explain it to them. Maybe because I had a lot of children myself.

I had a good and bad children in my (Laughs) group, too, with my own. But he [son] turned out all right and he's a school counselor at Kona. And the other one, the last one, he had a free scholarship from McKinley from sports, football. Then it was good for only one year at Boise, Idaho Junior College. Then after all the years to come further on, you had to pay so he says, "Well, Mom, I don't think I can make it. It's going to cost something."

I said, "You know what you do up there?" I said, "You go do some part-time work like you did over here." He used to do some part-time work at Queen's Hospital or work at a drive-in to help himself. He was that kind of boy.

So he got his Bachelor then he said, "Oh, Mom, I don't think I can make my Master's."

I said, "You just stick it out and you do your Master's and I'll send you money and you finish your Master's. I'll make a loan." And I made a loan and he went through.

VL: Was it easy to get the loan?

EM: Yeah because I didn't bring home all my money. I usually try to put so much every month in there [credit union] like stand-by in case I, you know what I mean, needed money.

VL: How long did they give you to repay the loan?

EM: How much you want to pay. If I made a \$800.00 loan, they put me on \$20.00 a week. As long as I still working, it's going through, it's being paid back.

VL: Automatically deducted from your pay?

EM: Yeah.

VL: The last time you said that when you were laid off at Hawaiian Pine, you would go to Libby's sometimes?

EM: That was early part.

VL: The early days, yeah?

EM: Yeah. Libby and California Packing, CPC.

VL: And how would you know there was work elsewhere?

EM: Oh, the girls would say, "Hey, you got laid off?"

I say, "Yes."

They would say, "Oh, they're hiring over there, go over there." So I think they picking pineapples, I go there, I end up scrubbing cans with steel wool in the big, deep bins with cold water and steel wool. But you got paid the same, 17 or 18 cents an hour at that time, was okay. (Laughs)

VL: Did Hawaiian Pine mind that you worked at other canneries?

EM: No, because the cannery was off. They weren't hiring so you were free to go anywhere you wanted to go work.

VL: Did you ever think that you might stay at either Libby's or CPC and not go back?

EM: No, I looked at the cannery, it's so drabby. It wasn't convenient and they didn't have the sanitation.

VL: Which one didn't?

EM: Libby. Boy you walk with nice, good shoes, you know school shoes, the Oxfords. You walk in the juice and water. And the aprons they give you is like an oilcloth apron and when the juice gets on there, it just drips right down into your stockings. Wasn't sanitary so Libby I didn't care. That was the first and the last. (Laughs). But CPC wasn't bad. I would work in the cannery and we would work warehouse. But the most sanitary cannery was Dole out of the three canneries.

VL: How about in terms of friendliness of people? Can you compare the three?

EM: I think Dole had the most. They hired the most. They had the most tables. And they had all the conveniences, the cafeteria right within reach and you had the wagons that sell food, automobiles outside, wagons selling food outside. You want to go eat outside lunch, you go. You want to eat cafeteria, you want to bring your own lunch, okay. We had warmers there. We had about 40 warmers and then you would bring your lunch in a little can, a little pail, your rice on the top and maybe your stew or your chopsteak and vegetables below and you keep it there and when you come up, pick it up it's hot like off the stove and you eat it hot.

VL: Most times did you bring lunch?

EM: Yeah, I brought lunch most of the time. If the line-up says going be short hours certain days, you bring sandwich but if they have eight, nine, ten hours, you'd better bring hot lunch. That's one good thing with their schedule.

VL: Then you always knew the day before?

EM: Yeah, we always knew. It was all written on the board, what hours you're going to have.

VL: Where was this board?

EM: Right down where the tables are. When you finish working and the whistle blows, you come and has the schedule right there, right in the big blackboard and in chalk. Right there, high up, visible.

VL: How would you keep your time, the record of the time, the hours you worked there?

EM: Every day you come home, you put how many hours you made and we foreladies used to compare. You know that, what you call that thing today, makes lot of mistakes?

VL: Computer?

EM: Computer, yeah. We been getting \$15.00 short every time we foreladies compare. I say, "How come?"

(Laughs) Sure enough, the computer make mistake at the cannery.

VL: This must be later on?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Didn't you have a timekeeper?

EM: We had timekeeper. She comes down and takes your time in. Like the workers, you see, in the back we got numbers. Even us, we got numbers.

VL: And these are pinned to your clothes?

EM: Pinned to your clothes in the back of your apron.

VL: So does the timekeeper just walk around?

EM: Uh huh, she walks up and down but not lately, we have timecards and if they start at 7 o'clock [a.m.], by 8 o'clock [a.m.], they all in the timekeeper's office, timecards.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 6-23-2-79
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Elizabeth Matthews (EM)
March 16, 1979
Liliha, Oahu
BY: Vivien Lee (VL)

VL: This is an interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Matthews. Today is March 16, 1979. We're at her home in Liliha.

Now, I'm going to ask you a little about the early days between 1927 and 1937 when you were working summertime.

In those days, would you know most of the women that you worked with? Like on your table, would you know the other ladies on the table?

EM: Well, there's only one living today. The rest all gone.

VL: Yeah. But I mean back then, did you know all their names?

EM: Oh, yeah, I had. That's why I told you I had that friend at Nanakuli. She passed away and my other good friend was there in 1927, she died in the Mainland Christmas Day and the daughter brought her body here and then the only friend left is Rose Miyashiro, and she goes to the [Makua Alii Senior Citizens] Center, too, and she comes from Kakaako. She's the only one left.

VL: Did you always work with those same ladies on your same table?

EM: Off and on. Usually they always separate you when you---they don't allow you doing, you know, something like school. They don't allow you to be talking. They want you to pay attention to what you doing.

VL: So if they switched you to another table, then you wouldn't know those other ladies or you still kind of knew them?

EM: I knew them but not close, you know. Like hello and all that in years to come but not very close friends, yeah.

Yeah. There's only one left and one more that went there in the room that day we were there [at Makua Alii--the first meeting between ESOHP staff and Makua Alii Senior Citizen Center members who used to work in the pine canneries], she's still working down the cannery but she came later. Not in the 1937.

VL: Was that Mrs. Souza [another interviewee]?

EM: Yeah, she came later.

VL: So, how many good friends would you say you had at the cannery in those 10 years?

EM: Oh, many, many. About two or three dozen friends but they all gone or they moved to other islands.

VL: When you did talk with them, what kind of things did you talk about?

EM: About your home life. How was your home life and married life, how was your children and how you make ends meet with the Depression.

I say, "Well, I'm pretty lucky. I got gingers---when there's no pineapple, I have gingers to take care." [EM picked and sold ginger flowers to lei makers.] The gingers started from April to October or November. The gingers lasted but it goes down, less and less and less.

VL: Yes. How did some of the other ladies make ends meet during that time? What did they tell you they did?

EM: Oh, some went to work in restaurants, I think.

VL: Did you folks confide in each other about your personal problems?

EM: Yeah, we used to, yeah. We used to confide.

VL: Would this be right at the packing table that you would do that?

EM: Yeah, or at lunch hour or after work, yeah.

VL: What kind of things would you do with them after work?

EM: Just talk and then I say, "Well, I have to go. I got children home." or "I got a date, I gotta go." (Laughs)

VL: Did you folks ever get together? This is still 1927 to 1937.

EM: Yeah, we had parties, you know. The company gave us parties. Christmas parties and we had the harvest. After harvest, there would be a big dance or parties, yeah.

Luaus, too. Someone would make a starting and then we all would chip in and we go have luau and dance, yeah.

VL: Were there some things that you did together that were not sponsored by the company?

EM: That's what I mean, the luau. The company give dances and, you know, maybe, cookies, cakes and punch during the dance and they have it in the warehouse in the back. Decorate the warehouse up. Take all the sealed cans all one way and we would dance on concrete floor.

VL: Did you folks have to pay?

EM: No. That was free on the company. We have free, what you call, Christmas parties and after harvest.

VL: Who would do the decorating?

EM: The workers there, the boys. The boys decorate.

VL: The warehouse boys?

EM: The warehouse boys.

VL: Was that something that you folks looked forward to?

EM: Oh, yeah, to go to the dance. (Laughs) Pretty good, huh?

VL: When you were not working, off season, did you miss your company friends?

EM: Yeah, but off and on we would get together, go picnics, go swimming, you know, like that.

VL: So you'd see them anyway?

EM: Yeah, I see them anyway. We had telephones. We had that old-fashioned telephone, the long one. I wish I kept one at least. No, we turn in for the new ones, yeah.

VL: How about the 10 years that you stayed at home, 1937 to 1947, did you ever do things with your old cannery friends in those 10 years?

EM: No, I was really home with my children. I was with these gingers. I didn't work at all.

VL: Did you kind of lose contact with them?

EM: Yeah, I lost contact with them.

VL: And then, did you miss them?

EM: I miss them but I had all my children, eh. I care more for them, their welfare. Yeah.

VL: The other ladies, did they still work straight through?

EM: Uh huh, they went through the same cycle I did. They raised their children. Then they go back. I think we all did when we had our families.

VL: Switching the subject a little, now. Wartime, some people were making pretty good money at defense jobs, yeah?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did you ever think of trying for that?

EM: No, I couldn't. I couldn't. My husband went and work for U.S.E.D. [United States Engineering Dept.] First, he worked up at Shafter in that Aliamanu Crater. They were building up and were putting away all ammunition there and there were women working in that ammunition depot before. Right up at Moanalua, see. He got in 1941.

VL: And the reason why you couldn't work was...

EM: Because I thought it's best you stay home with your mother and the kids in case anything happen. Too dangerous [for the children] to be living with only my mother and then I go to work. Just stay home because the money was good, wartime.

VL: So he made enough?

EM: Enough to cover, yeah. I didn't have to go work. But their [points to grandchildren] mother [i.e. EM's youngest child], I had her in 1946, so after that I had somebody take care of her and she was about a year old and I went back to work, 1947.

VL: That was the aunty that took care of them?

EM: Yeah.

VL: When you went back in 1947, did you see your old friends again?

EM: She was about 11 months, no, 10 months old when I went back, I think. No, she was about eight or nine months, yeah. Born December 19, 1946 so December, January, February, March, April, May--June, I went back, 1947. I have my cards, you know. That's when I started to work there until I retired September 30, 1977. And that's the card I use in order to enter the cannery. I still can go there and buy whatever juice that's on sale and everything. And in case I should want to build a home up at Lanai, I can use the company's barges. I'm still in it. I still can use, go through that channel. I'm not put out.

VL: Uh huh. Everybody has that?

EM: Yeah, especially according to your years and that you didn't give them any trouble.

VL: So when you went back in 1947, were your friends from 10 years earlier...

EM: Some showed up. Not all of them. Most of them showed up. And some moved to the other islands.

VL: When you went back in 1947, was that before the strike, that five-day strike?

EM: Yeah, I went in June. Then they had a strike in...

VL: July, yeah. When was the first time that you heard about the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union]?

EM: I read before but I didn't join because I wasn't intermittent.

VL: Do you remember how you heard about it? Who told you about it?

EM: Was in the paper and I had friends down there [cannery], man friends, and they said, "Why don't you join the union? Why don't you join the union? When you gonna join the union?"

They were strong. They were already in the union long time.

VL: Before---while you were still a seasonal?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Before 1937 then?

EM: But I said, "I'm not an intermittent. I have no business join the union. They still hire me every year I come back."

VL: Why did you want to join or what did they tell you was good about it?

EM: Oh, this, that, lot of malarkey. They don't help you. The just take so many percent out of your wages. You have to pay so much, huh.

VL: So in those early days when you heard about it, you didn't care to join?

EM: No, no. You have to be a full time worker or part-time, like that, intermittent. Yeah, and you can join.

VL: So your men friends were joining, though, yeah?

EM: Yeah, but they were intermittents, too, and they were trying to get us, if we were intermittents, to join.

I said, "I'm not intermittent, yet. I'm not joining."

VL: Did you think it could do any good?

EM: I don't think so.

[Taping stops so EM can move barking dogs.]

VL: So you were saying, before, you thought it probably couldn't do any good but in 1947 when you came back to work, you joined, yeah?

EM: Yeah.

VL: What made you decide to join?

EM: Well, that would guarantee you your work, you know. They cannot lay you off or something unless you do something bad, but they can't find fault with you if you doing your work right.

VL: Did you think that was the most important thing about unions at that time?

EM: Uh, I didn't altogether care for union because a couple of times when we needed help, we didn't get very much help.

VL: What were those times?

EM: When we went on a strike couple of times, they didn't give us anything. But when we had one strike later on in years---I would say about 10 years ago, I think. We had a big strike. I don't know what year that was and then they passed food out for us and canned goods. That was the only time I remember...

VL: Oh, yeah. That was 1968.

EM: Nineteen sixty-eight, yeah, that was the one.

VL: Sixty-one days.

EM: Yeah. We were out on a long strike. That's the only time we got anything from them.

VL: Can you tell me about that strike? You know, what started it and what your involvement was with it?

EM: Was the company involvement with the ILWU. You know how they didn't want every time you would ask for higher pay, eh, a pay raise. Yeah, that was the cause of it.

VL: So how did you know that you were going to strike?

EM: They all would let us know. "Stay away from work. There's a strike going on." What they asking for, the company doesn't want to give so....

VL: Did you agree with that?

EM: No. Sometimes we didn't. We like to keep on working, yeah. We took a loss when you come to think of it. Two sides take the loss, you know, when you go on strikes.

VL: Did you stay home all that time or did you...

EM: No, we went to picket in the morning. Come then the next hour and we go two hours and the next hour and next hour and next hour until 3 o'clock [p.m.]. Starting 6:30 or 5:30 in the morning. You have to get....

VL: Did you go every day?

EM: Yeah.

VL: And then when would they give you food?

EM: After that strike went quite a length of time, people were bickering about it, you know. We was saying we having hard time. Some had hard times with their rents but I didn't have hard time with my rent. Some had hard time with---oh, a lot of hardships, yeah so the union had helped the ones that needed money with their homes. They had mortgages and all of that.

VL: How would you let the union know that you were having a hard time?

EM: You go direct down to them and tell them your trouble.

VL: Who would you talk to?

EM: But I didn't go because my husband was working on a ship and then he made enough money to pay this place, see. We had a mortgage. They started building this house in 1957, I think.

VL: But you say on the other strikes, the union didn't help you at all?

EM: Oh, yeah, the other strikes. We didn't get no help.

VL: In the strike that happened in 1947, did you go on the picket line, too?

EM: Yeah.

VL: What was that like?

EM: I don't know. That was the first experience for me and my husband happened to be in San Francisco. He bought a newspaper there and then he look and he saw me right on the front page on Dillingham Boulevard.

And he called up and he said, "What you doing?" . (Laughs)

VL: What did he think of it?

EM: With that, you know...

VL: Picket sign.

EM: Picket sign, yeah.

He said, "Well, maybe it's going be a long one. Take it easy."

VL: How did you feel towards the people that went through the line and went to work?

EM: Cannot do nothing. They work years for the company and they were truthful to the company, huh.

VL: Did you have hard feelings with them?

EM: No, no. To me, that was a new experience. I didn't have hard feelings. I didn't feel bad towards them. Was up to them.

VL: Did you think that it was worth it, that 1947 strike?

EM: I don't think so. That was a bad one. I seen was rowdy. They put them, you know, swearing and cussing among each other. Men were doing that and you see them being pushed in the paddy wagon and taken down to the police station. That was right at the front gate on Dillingham Boulevard.

VL: Why were they taken away?

EM: Because they start a ruckus there. Swearing at, you know--- calling names. Calling names.

VL: To who?

EM: To each other. The one that by-pass them on the picket line. To me was a experience and I felt kind of bad, you know. I wish I didn't join it. (Laughs) That's the first time I experienced picketing, you know.

VL: What did your friends think about it?

EM: Some were used to already. They had [pickets] at all the openings [to the cannery grounds]. One in the back on Iwilei.

Picket there. One picket on Dillingham Boulevard and one more picket line where the trucks turn in. The second stop and go light across HCC [Honolulu Community College] but there was no more HCC before there, yeah.

VL: After that five days or so, you went back to work?

EM: Yeah, we were called to come back.

VL: Yeah. How was it with the...

EM: Company?

VL: Yeah, the company people?

EM: Oh, they didn't, they didn't---because they go right through you [the picketers] on their cars or walk. Get off from the bus and go through. They kind of hesitate, you know, what we did, yeah.

VL: When you went back to work, how was the feeling?

EM: Not so good but after that, when you come to work, you work and then things got all right again. They didn't lay nobody off.

VL: What do you mean by "not so good?"

EM: The feelings were no good.

VL: Did they show this to you somehow by doing something?

EM: Yeah, they would talk to you little more funnier, you know. Not like before, you know, heart-to-heart talk. They would be offended like, but I didn't feel bad. I was thinking what's going on. I always think about it--what's going on. Is it worth it. I used to ask all those questions to myself or I would ask my friend, "You think this was worth it?"

Some would say, "Yeah, you get a raise."

I say, "Yes. The more money we make, the more money they take out." I keep telling. I think we was doing just fine the old way. (Laughs)

VL: Before?

EM: Yeah. Everybody had their views on it but that was my view of it.

VL: You were kind of skeptical about the results?

EM: Yeah, the results. Picketing and going on a strike. I think many are when they have things like that.

VL: Yeah. There was another one in 1957, a walkout. Do you remember that?

EM: Yeah.

VL: It was one day long.

EM: But I wasn't in it. [EM later says she did participate]. I was working and somebody made a walkout from the other shift. What month was that? In 1957 I kept on working. I happen to be stuck in there.

VL: Stuck in where?

EM: In the cannery, working.

VL: Oh, where were you? You weren't in trimming or packing at that time?

EM: Yeah. I was packer. Forelady.

VL: Six hundred women walked out protesting something about Dee Dupont [training supervisor].

EM: Oh, yeah. She came from Maui.

VL: Yeah. Do you remember what that was all about?

EM: Yeah. Well, she came and she tried to demote our head foreladies and she wanted---they put her to be the head forelady and she was teaching her way of picking the pineapple up and then, sort it out her way which we didn't like. We went to her classes.

VL: What did she want you to change?

EM: To change, I don't know why.

VL: What was she telling you to do instead? What was her way of....

EM: Her way was different from our foreladies. Differently from our way. But she didn't last long. She committed suicide, eh.

VL: I think she tried.

EM: She did. Went up in here [head] and she died.

VL: Well, you said you didn't walk out that time [1957]?

EM: I did. I did. There was another one we had in 1976 [1974], I think. You try look, later, in the 1970's. I was working third shift and I stayed back and finished up with the girls, whatever I had. We didn't have nobody come in and help us. There was no more first shift. I stayed until 10 o'clock [a.m.]. From 9:30 or 10 o'clock that night until 10 o'clock [a.m.] the next day.

VL: Daytime?

EM: Daytime, yeah. They [picketers] stopped them [first shift workers] outside the gate and they couldn't come in, take over our place. The first shift, eh.

VL: So you just stayed?

EM: I stayed. That was in the 1970 something. You try look.

But this 1957 one, I was out there. I was one of the 600 women, too. I didn't care for Mrs. Dupont.

VL: I'm still not clear why you folks walked out [in 1957].

EM: You still not clear? Out of the blue sky she came over there to take over the cannery and knowing nothing about pineapples. We went to her classes and took all the fruits over there and she tried to teach us to sort the pineapple the way she wants. She didn't want the way we sort our pineapple, the way we were taught by experienced head foreladies and foreladies and assistant head foreladies. Where she came from? So we found out she came from Maui. Mrs. Dupont, we all didn't like her.

VL: Were there any other things that she wanted you folks to do? Or to change besides the way of packing?

EM: I don't know. I think that was the main thing. Different ways of packing, we didn't care for that.

VL: Was that something you folks just decided to do right then and there and you walked out or....

EM: Yeah.

VL: You were on the job already and you...

EM: No. We walked out. We said that we won't come for work the next day and that's when we stayed outside. Nobody came in. They had nobody to work and that was all with that packing and trimming. Six hundred stayed out, walked out.

VL: I read somewhere that you had, I think that was, 16 grievances that you gave to the company.

EM: Yeah. That came from all departments, I think.

VL: Yeah. Who writes those down? Who writes those grievances down and gives them to the company?

EM: We were so sympathetic. We loved our head foreladies, and what you call, she'd be up and demoting the ones that work all the years of their life. That's what we didn't like, demoting the others below...

VL: Below her?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Did you folks have a meeting about this problem?

EM: Yeah, we did and we went and walk out. We said she better go back where she was. But you know why. She had some personal grievances with her husband, huh.

VL: So when you folks had this big meeting, is that on work time?

EM: No. We had one meeting down the [union] hall. We got together on a Saturday, I think, or after work. Was after work or Saturday.

VL: And then you all voted to not come to work the next day?

EM: Yeah. As long as they going to keep her. And as long as going to have her way, we didn't want.

VL: I see. Was she fired after that?

EM: No, then that thing [walkout] happened. Then she start floating here and there in the company. The company got her several other jobs and then she didn't care for that, you know. Like, maybe they made her do book work.

VL: So the company listened to you folks, then?

EM: Yeah, 'cause we didn't want her---we want our regular experienced foreladies that been working from bottom up like we did.

VL: Did the union officials encourage you to walk out or how did they feel about it?

EM: No. They all stood up together. We went to the union and said, "Who is this Mrs. Dupont coming here and giving us different orders?"

VL: Did the union agree with you that you folks walk out?

EM: Yeah, the union agree. "Well, what you folks don't want, do what you folks want. Don't show up and get her out." But something happened to her.

VL: I don't know if you remember there was another one the next year, 1958, a two-day walkout. I'm not sure if this is correct but it [the chronology of events based on library research] says protesting work on Saturdays. A thousand cannery workers walked out for two days because they didn't want to work on Saturdays. Do you remember that?

EM: In 1958?

VL: Yeah.

EM: Yeah, I don't know why. For myself, I didn't care about that. I didn't go picket. I didn't care when I worked. But there were many that didn't want. They wanted the five days and today, what you think, it's getting less and less, the days. Now come to think the ones that wanted no Saturday. The ones that are working are squawking because they don't work Saturdays. They only work five days a week. Last year, that's what happened. In 1978, they didn't work one Saturday.

VL: So, did you stay home, though?

EM: Yeah. I didn't want to cross the picket line. I stayed home. I didn't go show up. To me, Saturday was good. Was extra, but there were a few of them that didn't want. Then we had one more.

VL: Nineteen sixty-five.

EM: Nineteen sixty-five. And we had one more yet in the 1970's. Do you have 'em over there? Yeah, we had one. They call it---what they call it....

VL: Nineteen seventy-four? When the sugar workers struck, too.

EM: Yeah, we were sympathizers.

VL: Did you agree with that?

EM: No. They call it a cat walkout or something.

VL: Wildcat.

EM: Wildcat. The wildcat---I wasn't in it. I was working [third shift] and I was waiting for the first shift come in. They didn't come in. I stayed and finished all the gloves and the office came and help because some of my girls were too tired. We worked from 9:30 [p.m.] until in the morning and that was young girls. They extra tired so I stayed until 10 o'clock [a.m.] and she said, "We'll do the rest. We'll shut everything off." I didn't go in that one.

VL: How about the 1965 strike? It was one day long. Did you picket on that one?

EM: What month was that?

VL: March.

EM: No. Didn't picket in that one.

VL: So, sometimes you picketed. Sometimes, you didn't.

EM: Yeah, I had my opinion but that last one, 1974, I was stuck in there waiting for the first-shift forelady come in with her girls. And all of the office ladies said, "Elizabeth, look like you not going home. They having a wildcat strike."

I said, "Yeah. Well, let 'em go."

"How about you, you can stand it?"

I said, "I don't think my girls can stand." I had all brand new girls, you know, first year they were working there and then....

VL: Did you get extra pay for that?

EM: Yeah, I had.

VL: Overtime?

EM: Overtime, yeah.

VL: Did you always know what was in your new contract every time you got a new contract?

EM: Not too much. The only thing we know, we going get so much for raise, so much for this. They dropped it down 5 cents for every year. Just like now, the kids are making \$2.00 something, \$2.80 something, then they going to raise them up. This year, they gonna have \$2.90. But last year, they had less. And as every year go by, the four year contract, every year, they go up.

VL: How would they let you know what was in your new contract?

EM: They have in on the blackboard. We have blackboard. What and what is going on in the locker room.

VL: Oh, locker room. How about meetings like that?

EM: Yeah, we had stop-work meetings. Instead of starting at 7 o'clock [a.m.], we would have meeting from 7 o'clock [a.m.] until quarter to nine [8:45 a.m.] and we would go back work and start work 9 o'clock [a.m.] and we work later, two hours more because it affects our schedule. We happen to have eight hours but through the stop-work meeting, two hours we go over that to make our eight hours.

VL: Did you ever go see your steward for any reason?

EM: No, I never did bother. Sometime I didn't feel like being in the union. (Laughs)

VL: Going back a little bit. We were talking about the changes that happened in that 10 years that you were gone. Can you compare

like when you first went back in 1947. What things were changed from 1937?

EM: Well, the machines were better and tables were set up better.

VL: How's "better"?

EM: Well, they made more, you know. You feel like working there. Like before was drabby, eh. Everything here and there. [After 1947] all in order, everybody has to put everything in order. Then we had the new system--the lines going up and all of that in later years [cans were transported mechanically]. Because with the tray boys and the truckers, they always spill the whole stack [of cans] down and damaged. In the new method the cans come down [automatically]. You pack it in and it goes right on up to the cooker.

VL: That made you feel better about working?

EM: Yeah. But then they tune up the machines, you know, make 'em faster. Just like a radio, you tune 'em up louder, down there.

VL: You were working harder then?

EM: Yeah. (Laughs) We were working harder. The higher the pay was going, the harder you were working and the stricter the rules.

VL: Did you actually know that they speeded up the machine?

EM: You can tell.

VL: Maybe they just had fewer ladies to do the packing?

EM: Yeah, and they cut down the ladies. They cut off and was less workers to be hired. Not very much.

VL: How about changes in the rules?

EM: Well, the sanitary rules were there and dispensary rules were there. Same.

VL: Or changes in the type of people that were working, the ages, the ethnic...

EM: They always went according from 16 [years old] on.

VL: I mean were there more older people now or more younger people?

EM: They all well-balanced. All mixed. And if they tried, they couldn't do that job, they always had some other job for them to be---like you know pickers with the dustpan. Pineapple is slippery like banana skin, you know, if you ever step on a piece. You break your ankle. They put them maybe work in the apron room or in the upstairs in the, what you call, our locker room.

VL: This is the slow ones [packers or trimmers]?

EM: Yeah, they put 'em up there.

VL: When you went back in 1947, what was different about the packing itself?

EM: Less girls but same pack three ways [i.e. pack three different grades] and later, pack two ways. The rest all went down for crush. They made lots of money on crush, yeah.

VL: When you went back to work in 1947, some of your children were still quite young, yeah?

EM: Yeah. My last boy and my last girl--the one here [she lives with EM]--she was about nine months old when I went and my boy was about going two years.

VL: How did you organize your household? Did you have your children...

EM: I had somebody home and then I wrote down, make schedule for them.

VL: Oh, how did you do that?

EM: Just write---bring one paper, write it down in ink so they won't erase.

VL: You mean like one child does...

EM: Uh huh. The boys clean the yard. The girls wash their clothes. The others cook, clean house. They all did their chores. I didn't have problem there.

VL: You divided up all the chores?

EM: Yeah, all because my mom was living and she was a little older and she wasn't feeling well and I said, "You folks have to do all that because grandma cannot help you folks."

VL: Then were your children good?

EM: Yeah, they were good. They were good about it. So I got two children schoolteachers. One with a master's degree and one is a school director in Kona. So my husband's family---his father's sister was a schoolteacher in Kauai. Anahola side. I think my two children took after them and in her family, my father-in-law's sister, no schoolteachers. I met one of my husband's cousin at the Makua Alii and she said, "Oh, you got the schoolteachers."

She said, "There's nothing in our family."

I said, "Well, it goes one way or the other." (Laughs)

VL: How did your children feel about you working cannery?

EM: They didn't mind. Then I put them all to work to the cannery. My boys, my girls, they all went through the same thing.

VL: How did they like it?

EM: My boys didn't care much for it because the foreman was so funny. He wouldn't talk right. He would swear at them. They walk out. They walk out. (Laughs) They don't stand for anybody swearing, you know.

VL: How did your girls like it?

EM: Oh, all right. They worked. Except my youngest girl [Gail Reyes] didn't work. The boy's [EM's grandson's] mother, Mrs. Reyes, yeah. She didn't work.

VL: Did you have any kind of appliances at home that would save work, you know, like....

EM: I had washing machine. The war years, I bought it, washing machine, refrigerator. Then when I moved here---when we built this house in 1957. Then five years later, I bought a dryer. I still have that dryer. Washer and dryer.

VL: So those things helped in your....

EM: Helped a lot, yeah.

VL: If you had to discipline the children, who would do that?

EM: When my husband came home, I would talk about some problems I had with them. Sometimes the boys, especially.

VL: But he was gone on the sea a lot, yeah?

EM: Yeah, but he would drop by all the time. Sometimes he wouldn't take the Orient run. He'd get that city of Honolulu, city of Los Angeles, the one week run, seven days run and be home in no time.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

VL: You were talking about the job of a [packing] forelady?

EM: Yeah. You watch how they are packing and then if you see it's incorrect, you step in and you help that girl out. And the girl that's counting, you tell her to count one less because you're

going to talk to this girl and teach her the correct way of picking up pineapple and starting from where, from the top or from the bottom. It depends if you on the right and on the left turning, you know. Above, or turning this way, below. [I.e. Depending on which side of the packing table you are on, the end of the table could be on your right or your left side.]

VL: Who's counting what, now?

EM: The girl that's first. [At] the slicer right there. The pineapple comes out of the slicer. She's counting for how many girls below her. So if she counts one, two. That's for two girls and then there's [five more girls, making a total of] seven and with the counter, it's eight. Then she puts in a long row eight pineapples for the next five girls, [and] two for the first two girls on her left or if the table facing this way, upwards, then for the girls on her right. Whatever way you change. [The method described in this section is as follows: the first packer receives the fruit from the slicer. As the whole, sliced pines move down the belt, she spaces them in twos and fives; seven pines for the seven women packers below her. The spacing facilitates recognition of "their pine," that is, which of the seven pines is "theirs" to pack.]

VL: So if you're busy talking to one of 'em, then she...

EM: She counts one pineapple less.

VL: Is she controlling the amount that goes down?

EM: Yes, right.

VL: Can she just stop---what does she do? Stop the machine?

EM: No, no, no.

VL: How does she control the amount?

EM: It comes from the other girls [the trimmers]. It's on a timing basis. The speed is not speeded up. The belt doesn't run that fast. Then now, today, oh, that belt goes. The girls are crabbing today but I don't know.

VL: So the first girl when she sees that you're busy...

EM: Yeah, I'll tell her that I have to speak or correct a girl on the table, to count one less.

VL: And what does that mean when she counts one less?

EM: No pineapple---all right, there's seven girls below her. Two for the first two girls on her left or on her right and then the other five is for the rest of the girls. Used to be eight on a table. Now, there's only three on a table. That's slices.

VL: Yeah. Does that mean that she lets less pine go by before she picks up her next one?

EM: It's all counted in there. She's supposed to pick it up.

VL: She picks up every eighth one, right?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Now she'll start picking up every seventh one?

EM: Yeah. With the counter, altogether it's eight girls but she is counting for the seven below her. Two for the second and the third [girls] and then five for the rest of the five below. You cannot make it in a long row [eight pines in a group] because some will wonder why so much. That's why you had to cut it down [to two smaller groups of two and five pineapples]. We tried all kind methods. (Laughs)

Today, it's different on chunk line. It's automatic. It just comes out fast so there is no counter. The girl that's way ahead above there, she throws down the ends [the top and bottom slices of pine] and see that it's nice and round. And the second and the third girls rolls it around to see, to look for blemishes or---the trimmers have picked and made holes in it---take it all out. Then the other girl puts it all together nicely and it goes in the automatic and it's all cut into chunks. Only three girls, today, and once in a while they have slices when the best pineapple come in. July, August, then they'll pack all the slices and it's counted like that. [Now] it's not [groups of] five, two. It's [groups of] four, two and with the counter, it's seven but sometimes they don't have a counter. You be counting. Only six girls, you count and pick up your pine [every sixth one]. You be the counter and pick up your first pineapple.

VL: Oh. When the first girl is the counter, does she say something to the other girls? How do they know which pine to pick up?

EM: They know because they rotate every half an hour. They going to do the same job. They go up....

VL: Say if I'm number 4 girl?

EM: Yeah.

VL: How do I know which pineapple to pick up?

EM: That number 4 is coming down. Part of your pineapple is in there. You cannot let the whole one go down because one of them is yours and if you didn't pick it up, you know what the last girl does. She picks it up, put it in the front of you and slides 'em [back] up, pass it on. They know who missed it. When you get the knack of it, you know who missed it, who let it go by.

VL: Now, when you were forelady, were there ever any arguments over this kind of thing? You know, somebody pushing the pine back up?

EM: Yeah, but we talk nicely to them. If you don't, they keep on doing that for the whole day or you be going in the office. So if you talk nicely to them, everything runs smooth. You know, don't make an issue. Just tell 'em it's not nice. She be all wet or she get pineapple juice in your eye and that's one of the worst things to have, pineapple juice in your eye. It burns and you have to go to the dispensary. No excuses.

Some of them say, "Oh, I'll go put water in it."

"No. Dispensary you go to," where they put medication in there because water isn't enough to take care of that juice in your eye. It burns.

VL: How about as a forelady? Did you rate your workers or evaluate them?

EM: Oh, yeah. You had to give them rating just before our season is over.

VL: Only once per season then?

EM: About twice.

VL: Yeah. How do you rate them? You write something about each girl?

EM: Yeah and then the head forelady comes with you and then you go in the back of the girl and you go down and grade it good or bad or between, yeah.

VL: You have three choices on how to rate them?

EM: Yeah, yeah, three choices.

VL: And these were all written down?

EM: Oh, the names. The forelady have the names of all the girls. She gets the timecard. We have timecard to work on and every hour we have to write how many cans is registered for the hour. And when you through work, you write what time you got through and then the total and you press it off, zero for tomorrow morning. And if your meter didn't work, call for a mechanic and then you make a note that the meter was off from so-so time, you know.

VL: This counts the number of...

EM: Cans, filled cans have gone up on the conveyer to go over in the cooker.

VL: When you first went back in 1947, they already had these cans...

EM: No, no. We still had the stacks.

VL: Tray boys?

EM: Tray boys but that was counted on the card by stacks. Twelve high make a stack.

VL: Oh. So [before 1947] you would have to actually count the...

EM: No, we don't do it. We let the boys do it. So he knows every time he takes one out, he makes a cross and go keep on. One this way and one that way and that's on the card and you see how much we make for the day. That's how it was.

VL: So after they got rid of the tray boys, then the foreladies had to keep track.

EM: Yeah, we had to keep track every hour; write the meter down. And the meter got jam up, stuck sometimes. (Laugh) Then you know. That's why always you go and look, see if the numbers are going. Not going, look the same, something wrong. Then you press the light for a mechanic to come and fix it. Then how long it took, you look at the time. There's a watch there. You write down and you make a notation on the side.

VL: How long what took? Oh, the mechanic?

EM: The mechanic to fix it. How long the meter was off and then on. Yeah, that was all wanted.

VL: What else? Anything else that they wanted?

EM: So far, so good. Then sometime we made pans. We didn't have it all in the can. Had square, aluminum pans---not stainless steel ---we had some kind of metal pans so we fill it up so the girls would work on tidbits with the long scooper. Hook it up [through the hole in the pineapple slice] and line it up in the flume and someone pushes the gun and makes all little ones. The kind in the fruit cocktail, tidbits.

But now we got it all automatic. Got a big machine and this pineapple goes down in there all on the flume. Each table puts it [the pine slices] on a flume and it goes down automatically. It's running down the belt.

VL: Before it was automatic, did you work on tidbits?

EM: Yeah.

VL: How did you like that?

EM: Was all right but splash. Lot of splashing.

VL: How many women would help with tidbits?

EM: Five. Or four.

VL: Was there a part of doing the tidbits that you liked, like the pressing of the gun or....

EM: Oh, I like to receive outside when it comes down in the gallon. You just pound it [the can] down so it doesn't be on the top and it goes down and you give to another girl. Another girl she'll put it on a tray and the tray boy would take it away. Not five girls. How many had? One to gun; one to scoop; and one to....three girls for tidbits but now, it's all run by automatic. You should go visit the cannery. They got it [the tidbits machine] right up the end of table 48. That was the tourist attraction, yeah. It still attraction there, now.

VL: As a forelady, how much packing did you do yourself?

EM: Nothing. We weren't supposed to pack unless we ran short of girls. Sometimes we didn't have enough fruit and they [the girls] were sent home and they cut down the tables. Then we would give up our forelady [position] and then go as regular and then work, pack. Yeah, depends.

VL: So, all day long, then, you're walking?

EM: Up and down, up and down, outside, inside, outside, inside.
(Laughs)

VL: Two tables?

EM: No, that was one table today. We walk up on the little platform, go there, around and come down. But now, there's one forelady for the trimming table and the packing table, both sides, and there is 11 girls on the trimming side, cutting and there's three on the packing side.

VL: So when you were forelady, how many girls did you have? Eight and eight? Eight on each side of the table?

EM: Eight for packing and you had 11 for trimming way back in 1947, not 1947---started this in 1960-something, I think, 1968.

VL: Nineteen sixty-eight?

EM: Yeah, 1968 we started us being forelady for [both] trimming and packing side. We had to go school to learn how to trim. I didn't know how to trim. Went one week school.

VL: Which did you prefer, being a forelady of just packing or packing and trimming?

EM: Oh, for me, didn't matter, didn't matter. I learned something, you know. Then all the foreladies would take chance to go work on the other end (tables 30 to 48), take care of the "specials" and take care of the girls. You pick up girls from the packing side. If they don't know, then you train them and we do that just before season. We train those girls. I even trained brand new girls. I stood by them and taught them how and I go one side and I look on the side how she making out. If she not doing so good, I come back correct her. But some of them are real good. They catch on fast and they rather work on the other side ["specials"] than work on the [packing] table.

VL: How about the other side, the double seamer side?

EM: Oh, that belongs to somebody else. That's on their side.

VL: You didn't learn that?

EM: No. We have no business with that. That's opening the tanks, the tubes for the syrup to go in and air and all of that. I just took care our side, our girls. Whatever cans ran. Some would be underfilled, one slice missing. She's able to pick it up and put it on the tray on the side. And the ones don't have too much and then you fill it up. You have a pan of chunks. You have gloves all the time. You fill it up and it's going. It's good.

VL: What was that job?

EM: Processing. Beginning of processing.

I took care of the crush girls down below. They were about 10 to 11, then they would cut it down. Depends if all the tables are running, they have 10 to 11 girls on crush. A wide belt. Whatever coming---the ends coming from all the tables in the cannery are coming down below and you to pick up leaves and brown spots and big cores and put it all down to go for juice.

VL: And when did this start?

EM: Oh, way back.

VL: Of all the different jobs in the cannery that you tried, which one did you like the best?

EM: Oh, I like that one on this side, "specials."

VL: "Specials." You liked "specials" the best?

EM: Yeah.

VL: And that's what, crush and...

EM: Crush and slices. Oh, they are all special machines that you pick up girls. You train 'em for those machines, to work on it

and there are so many pineapples coming down the table, you see. All of them are going certain machines, certain machines and I'm to make a list what machines are running. Then sometimes don't have that certain pineapple, that machine is closed. When that comes up, a foreman there on the processing would say so and so machine coming up. So and so thing coming on. You'd better get a girl. So I ask my superior, my head forelady, to please let me have a girl to work on it and then I have a girl. You know how many girls for all the machines? Sometimes I have 20, 22 and I end up with the ones cleaning down crush and putting out empty cans. I end up with 36 to 40 girls.

VL: And you're the only forelady there?

EM: Yeah, walking up and down.

VL: All "specials" side?

EM: All "specials" side.

VL: And yet, you like that the best?

EM: I liked it, yeah.

VL: Why?

EM: Oh, you get around. On top (overhead, reachable by a 12-step ladder) we have girls watching the [can] line (to make sure the cans go in right machine). She would put on the switch where it has to go down there. When it has to go to another machine, she'll close it (an open/shut gate) and it goes like little trains. But I never did work up there but I go and tell them, "Don't forget close the gate, open the gate." (Laughs) They like it up there ["on top"] and then they watch for cans underfill, overfill and stack it all on the tray and another woman below goes halfway on the step, then she gives the tray and she takes 'em away.

VL: This is in recent years?

EM: Yeah, the last two years. Yeah, I went to work at "specials."

VL: How about the pressure of a forelady job?

EM: We had it, but you just have to live with it. We all had it. They had meetings to brief. Do a lot of briefing on it, you know. Reminding you.

And we belong in different locker room. We were in foreladies' locker room and then the girls had their locker room but the cafeteria, we all eat the same. But I took home lunch, mostly.

VL: Of all the jobs that you had, which ones did you like the least?

EM: The trimmers because we had a lot of trimmers. Hard, you know, the trimmers. Not hard for me but some of them won't listen, you know. You have problems with them. But so far, I did pretty good. Maybe couple, that's all. But with the packers, no. No problem. You know our company bought out Libby and we had all the Libby workers that came our side and they were much slower. Their cannery, everything was slow but when they came to our cannery, everything was speed and was pretty hard and I didn't want to have argument but I said, "You folks have to do little faster. Our machines are faster than when you folks were at Libby. Our company bought out Libby's."

"Yeah, okay."

That's all but if you going to scold them outright, they belligerent. Belligerent and they don't want to go along with you.

VL: That happened to some other foreladies?

EM: Yeah, they have big trouble. So far, I never had trouble.
(Laughs)

VL: After you started again in 1947, you started all over with your seniority, right?

EM: Yeah.

VL: I mean you started building...

EM: I had to start from bottom up.

VL: Yeah. When you get more and more years, what kind of advantages do you get from having worked there longer?

EM: No advantage. I would say you experience all kinds of people in all walks of life. Was boys, too, you know. The boys we had, some was good, some was so tired. (Laughs)

VL: If you had 10 years seniority and somebody else had 15...

EM: Would that make a difference?

VL: Yeah.

EM: No. We got along. We got along.

VL: But didn't they get some little benefits because they had worked there longer, like maybe...

EM: Oh, yeah, when they retire, yeah. They get their full benefits.

VL: Yeah. But like maybe more informal kind of benefits. Like since they work longer, you let them choose first something...

EM: Oh, yeah, yeah. We always respect the oldest one. They have the priority, yeah.

VL: Yeah. Priority in doing what?

EM: Well, choosing what girls you would like. What I like "special," I had the priority of taking all the good girls on this side. They wasn't the kind to give me leftovers. Then when the season came, then they wanted me to train the new girls. I took them. They were all good.

When they heard I was going to retire, they say, "Oh, no."

I said, "You'll get another good forelady."

But they said, "Get the lousy forelady came up." (Laughs)

VL: Did everybody know how much seniority everybody else had?

EM: Yeah, because you would wear your tag on your back and would have the year you started.

VL: Oh, on the tag?

EM: Yeah.

VL: So you always know that?

EM: You always know how many years you had. See, I have my old tag and this is what I used to go down the cannery.

VL: Was this put on your uniform?

EM: Yeah, with a pin on your apron in the back. (For forelady, the tag has your number and name; for girls and boys, it also has your shift.)

VL: Yeah.

EM: June 5, 1947 [the date her seniority is counted from].

VL: What else would a person with more seniority get to do?

EM: Nothing. Same job unless she becomes head forelady then she has more to do but that's seniority and forelady, see.

VL: In those 30 years of working, did you ever think of quitting?

EM: No. I didn't think of quitting, no. I was satisfied.

VL: Did you ever think of changing jobs? Working someplace else?

EM: No, no.

VL: When you weren't working at cannery, did you look for work elsewhere?

EM: No, only the last in 1977 because the company made a new ruling. You have to look for an outside job, part-time, before you can collect your compensation so I'm taking care that old lady. Till today, I still taking care. That's partial job. You have to work partial outside.

VL: All before that, you did not?

EM: No, they didn't---you see, they made new laws. Somebody made a new law that you cannot collect compensation unless you go look for a job. Made that new law. Was that Lee, I think, and somebody was running, yeah. [EM thinks it may have been Rep. Kenneth Lee.] That's how the law changed.

VL: You know those 30 years, did you ever think that you wanted to do a different job inside the cannery like...

EM: Go to other departments?

VL: Yeah.

EM: I never care for it. They wanted me go work frozen. They wanted me to go can plant. Can plant was my first offer. I didn't want because I figure before we didn't work the whole year. We just work for 9 or 10 months and I figured, well, I have two months of rest and then the following year, you go back in January up to same like our 10 months, 9 months. Some years are 9 months. Some years are 10 months. I was satisfied; so I can be with my children.

VL: The can plant would have been full time, then?

EM: Yeah. I didn't care for it.

VL: A few more questions. Besides money, what would you say you gained from all your years at the cannery?

EM: I had lots of good, what you call---you know, I was satisfied with it and the surroundings, working conditions and everything was all right. Plus I made new friends. Even though I had my old friends, I made new friends. Wherever I go--I don't care where--the workers, even though they were real young, they came. They still remember me.

VL: Would you say that making friends was the best part of working or...

EM: Yeah, meeting new friends and working together with them and then teaching them something, you know, that they never experience. You know, the teaching and being nice to them. We had foreladies called in the office for getting rough with the girls and boys, you know, but I never had that.

VL: Overall, would you say you enjoyed your years working?

EM: Yeah, I enjoyed my years working and I'm going to one of my girl's retirement, this month, the end of this month. I think she makes 25 years.

VL: So even though you're retired now, you still see some of your old workers?

EM: Yeah, and we have a Hawaiian club there. I'm still with them.

VL: When did that start and when did you join?

EM: I think I joined 1968 but it started in 1962. Yeah, and I'm still in that Hawaiian club.

VL: It's only for Hawaiian people?

EM: No, we have Japanese, whoever want to be in there. Foreladies' Hawaiian Club.

VL: Only foreladies?

EM: No, any worker who wants to be in there.

VL: And what do they do?

EM: Oh, we have lunches and we get together and let each other know who's going to retire and we make trips to the islands, all of the islands, except Niihau and Kahoolawe and then we go to Las Vegas.

(Laughter)

VL: Why do they call it Hawaiian Club?

EM: Well, we speak Hawaiian, talk Hawaiian and then what news we hear, what's going wrong with Hawaiians, people taking the Hawaiian land and we have all that going on.

VL: Mostly Hawaiian people, then?

EM: Yeah, mostly Hawaiian. We have about four Japanese.

VL: Do they speak Hawaiian, too?

EM: They learning.

VL: Do you have classes?

EM: Meetings, not classes because they working and then they elect you for president and then I end up as secretary-treasury every time. (Laughs) It's called Pua Melia Club.

VL: What do you think of Hawaiian Pine as an employer?

EM: Well, I don't know. You know before, we had some good and some bad employer but as we got close lately, the last years, now, everybody is getting tightened up, tightened up down there. It's pretty bad. Plenty of them [the workers] wants to retire at 62. The company is putting pressure on them, yeah. That's what I heard from them.

VL: But in your own experience, how would you rate Hawaiian Pine as an employer?

EM: For myself, was all right because I worked--I told you before--at picking coffee and then working in the restaurants and all of that. I think over there was worse. Was all right [at the cannery]. We had a good deal from the employer. I never thought much of that, what you call, union. (Laughs)

That's what really put my two boys through school. We had credit union. I would save. They would take so much. I would let them, say, take \$20.00 every week from my paycheck. When that money was saved, then I wanted my boy to go to school, I would borrow so much in the thousands and they would take out and then pay back. That's one good thing about that. I couldn't go to the bank do that. And if I wanted money, I go right there and borrow money. I hardly went to the banks. I went to the credit union. They did a lot of good for me. One year I had three graduate one time. I had to go to the credit union. Give them something for graduation. So I have no kicks. (Laughs) I'm satisfied.

VL: I wonder if you have any opinions about the future of the pine-apple industry in Hawaii?

EM: I don't think no future because they went and put up one cannery in Mindanao, yeah. That's why they made a cutback here, you know. They took lots of our machines to Philippines and it's called PhilDole [sic--Dolefil]. Their wages are 15 cents an hour.

VL: What do you think of that?

EM: No good.

VL: Do you think that they should stay here?

EM: Yeah and another thing. I don't care for that airport at Poamoho in Wahiawa. I think it's the Big Five and the Dole Corporation, Castle & Cooke. They going to sell some of their land for that airport. That means less pineapples to be cultivated. I don't think much of that. [EM probably meant to say Del Monte.]

VL: Yeah. If there's no cannery---that cannery has been employing so many thousands of women...

EM: Yeah.

VL: Do you think it's a good job for women to go into?

EM: It is. Women, boys, children, you know, young students because it helps them with their education and if they going to sell Poamoho, which [Del Monte] owns at Wahiawa, for airport, that much less to be canned. That much less pineapple to be canned. Have you tried Taiwan pineapple in the can?

VL: No.

EM: Well, they have. I mean, Philippine, Philippine pineapple?

VL: No.

EM: They have Taiwan pineapple, too. That's not Dole, that's on their old---and Philippine pineapple, I haven't tried but somebody has tried and they say it's not as good as ours. But I say I gotta try first. (Laughs) I'm not listening to their opinion.

VL: Yes. If you had your life to live over again, would you prefer what you did, a woman with a family working part-time?

EM: Yeah.

VL: Or just working full time with a family, or no children and working full time?

EM: No, I prefer working that part-time and full time. It was mostly part-time because only 9 to 10 months you would work for Dole. That, I liked. To be with my family and that's what I had, you know. Kind of balanced.

VL: Okay. You liked it just the way it was?

EM: Was, yeah. That was good for me.

END OF INTERVIEW

**WOMEN WORKERS
in Hawaii's
Pineapple Industry**

Volume I

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

June 1979